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Statement to the Special Committee of 24 on East Timor

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Mr or Madame Chair, Members of the Special Committee of 24,

It has been 15 years since Indonesia invaded and annexed East Timor. Since then, the issue has been regularly discussed at this Committee. Perhaps recent world developments make it easier than in the past to reach a satisfactory solution to this question.

My aim here is to petition in favour of decolonisation of the territory. First I would like to give some arguments to support the need of securing self-determination to the people of East Timor. Then I would like to highlight the recent growing international concern on the question. Finally I will try and give some suggestions towards a satisfactory process of self-determination.

On the need for self-determination:

1. The unlawfulness of Indonesian presence in East Timor is not an issue at this Committee. Military invasion of a foreign territory flagrantly violates the UN Charter. The United Nations have reacted against the annexation through two Security Council and eight General Assembly resolutions.

2. The presence of East Timor on this Committee's agenda is relevant for two reasons. First, the decolonisation process started in 1974 by Portugal has not been achieved. Second, Indonesia behaves in East Timor like a new colonial power.

There is much evidence of this: compulsory use of Indonesian as the only authorised language; compulsory high school cursus including Indonesian history and study of

Pancasila (the Indonesian State's ideological corpus). It may be good reminding the Members at this point that the history and language of East Timor have little or no connection to those of Indonesia.

Even if we took an Indonesian viewpoint, from which the former features would appear natural, there would be evidence of colonial practices. The Timorese have little effective access to the administration of the territory, little access to economy and commerce, which are dominated by Indonesians (mostly military). There is virtually no possibility for a Timorese to find a job after graduating from high school. At least 20% of the population in Dili (the capital) is now non-Timorese.

Although a considerable amount of money is reported to have been used for development projects, it doesn't seem to benefit the Timorese. The rate of malaria and tuberculosis in certain regions is alarming, there are far too few doctors to satisfy the needs of the population. Natural resources of East Timor, including oil and natural gas in the Timor Gap, are being exploited by Indonesia with little or no profit to the Timorese.

These points are acknowledged not only by opponents but also by supporters of the Indonesian occupation. The (Indonesian-appointed) governor himself has complained of the high rate of unemployment, of the serious health condition in the territory and of the lack of profit by the Timorese of their own resources. A 1990 report of Gajah Mada University (an Indonesian university) has also highlighted this.

3. The East Timorese reject the Indonesian occupation, which is of an oppressive nature. This can be seen in three equally important ways:

a) *Explicit signs:* repeated demonstrations for independance in the presence of foreign witnesses, contacts with and statements to visitors, commitment of refugees in Portugal and Australia to an action towards self-determination. Demonstrators have subsequently been chased, arrested; in some instances they have been tortured or have disappeared. It is particulatly striking that the people who act and speak up, sometimes at the risk of their lives, belong to the younger generation which has grown up and has been educated under the occupation.

b) *Strong evidence:* a massive military presence (at least 12,000 troops for a population of some 700,000, according to diplomatic sources), a reluctance of the population to speak

Indonesian, a general atmosphere of fear, including fear to address or to be addressed by foreigners. This has been noted by all the visitors who have been able to travel without official interference since the 1989 opening of the territory. The continuing armed resistance, estimated at a few hundreds by the Indonesian armed forces, has not been suppressed and its highly wanted leader Xanana Gusmão has not been captured despite several attempts by the military; he has even been able recently to spend a month in Dili, have talks with clandestine networks and telephone abroad before returning safely to the hills. This gives evidence that the resistance is substantially supported by the population.

c) *Political unity:* the two main Timorese political parties, Fretilin and UDT, which have very different conceptions of society, both demand independance and have joined since 1986 in the Nationalist Convergence. The Convergence is recognised by Portugal, the legal administrative power of the territory. In East Timor the armed resistance (Falintil), which used to belong to Fretilin, has become 3 years ago independent of political parties at the initiative of Xanana Gusmão.

On international concern:

This has grown quite impressively in the last few years. More and more NGOs express concern on the human rights situation in East Timor; this is also true of the Churches. In the European Parliament, an important report on East Timor has been elaborated by Ms van den Heuvel in 1988 and five resolutions have been passed since 1986. The same evolution has touched the ACP/EC Joint Assembly. Last June, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly has unanimously adopted a resolution on East Timor. In the United States, thanks to the action of Rep. Tony Hall, letters of concern have been sent from the Congress to the Administration consistently in the past years. The latest in date, from November 1990, has been signed by more than half the whole Congress (223 members). The 1991 State Department report on the human rights situation worldwide acknowledges extensive violations in Indonesia and in East Timor.

Concern is not anymore voiced only about the human rights situation in the territory.The Congress letter asks for 'a process of peace talks' and 'negociations without preconditions among the parties directly involved'. The Council of Europe resolution demands a cease-fire and 'political preconditions for free exercise of self-determination'., The European Community statement at the UN Human rights Commission of last

February hopes for a solution found 'in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter (...) taking fully into account the interests of the East Timorese'.

UN action

I am not familiar enough with the work of the Special Committee to be able to do more than the following few remarks.

1. The UN, under the auspices of its Secretary General, has already been working for several years on a solution of the question by a process of consultations between the parties. A parliamentary delegation from Portugal, the administrative power, is supposed to visit the territory some time this summer in this framework.

2. The armed resistance has consistently shown its good-will by issuing peace plans, and has always been open to a ceasefire and negociations without preconditions. This has actually taken place in 1983, but negociations were subsequently broken by Indonesia.

3. The international climate, in particular its long-standing bipolarisation, has drastically changed for the better in the past few years. This could remove some obstacles to the solution of the East Timor question.

4. A difficult case of decolonisation has been successfully achieved last year by the United Nations. This gives hope that others, including East Timor, can be solved equally in the near future. In this respect, it may be worth reminding the Secretary General's statement last March to a delegation of *Parliamentarians for East Timor* that the East Timor question is just as important in the UN as other pending questions of self-determination.

I wish to thank you, Mr or Madam Chair, and members of the Committee, for your attention.